

# Patrick Kavanagh: an Irish Pastoral Poet in the City

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## Abstract:

*Patrick Kavanagh was born in 1904, came of age just after the First World War, and began his poetic apprenticeship in the 1920s when he wrote verses which were the essence of pastoral. Just before the break-out of the Second World War, he came to Dublin, where he was to spend most of his life, with some time spent in London in the 1950s. In his work, we can trace a journey from the first self-conscious verses of a country poet imbued with the spirit of creation, to an artist of major importance in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when he developed and evolved a new aesthetic about the situation of a country man in Dublin. This personal aesthetic, which has been defined in the 1990s by the eco-critic and poet Terry Gifford as "post-pastoral," was not only bound to have resonance with all city dwellers, but also indirectly touched upon issues of religious, national and social identities in its combined preservation and transformation of Kavanagh's rural Irish roots as an alternative to the discourses prevailing at the time - revivalist nationalism and political polarisations. His work can now be read as an illustration of the place of human consciousness in the ecological web, for his poetic autobiographies intertwine with his first experience of an unbounded Nature in the countryside, a love that, when recollected, transformed his poetry in the city in his later years. As this biographical survey of his poetic development shows, Kavanagh's particular brand of "urban pastoral," what the Romans would have called *rus in urbe*, is not merely elegiac for the past left behind in the countryside; we can see it too as a "post-pastoral" move that relies on the categories of "immanence" and "beauty" to make Culture inseparable from Nature. Kavanagh's poetry, therefore, also constitutes an idyllic quest for personal integrity in our times.*

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when modernism emerged as a new and cohesive body of work, Ireland was largely a pre-industrialised society. While Joyce brought the city to a new apotheosis, and Yeats imagined mythologies for the emerging Irish nation, a poet was born into a place, Inniskeen, County Monaghan, which, since the disappearance of the last bardic poets in Ulster, had experienced very little change. This was a different situation to that pertaining outside Ireland, where, over a century beforehand, Romanticism had answered back to the new scientific materialism and industrialisation which were to have their apogee in the mid-twentieth century. In rural Ireland, where Kavanagh was born, poets were still

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celebrating with pastoral their ties with the unspoiled countryside. Nature poetry had been a feature of Irish poetry since first recorded, the early period especially proving rich in allusions to the natural world, and Irish poets were the inheritors of this rather beautiful and elliptical poetry, which even today is celebrated for its spare and accurate language, apparent even in translation. Remnants of the earlier language survived in the surrounding culture which had been Gaelic in the relatively recent past, and although Kavanagh did not exploit this deliberately, phrases and idioms from this inheritance are found in his work.

It is my purpose in this essay to discover where Kavanagh's poetry fits with the newly developed theories of pastoral, anti-pastoral, and post-pastoral, and perhaps to invite a new assessment of his work in these terms for new readers. In his lifetime, Kavanagh's personality could be difficult, and this may account for the delay in the taking up of his work internationally. Perhaps this delay can be made up for in our times of urgent evaluation and re-evaluation, since there is now a need to provide a cultural tool to help us deal with our experiences of alienation from Nature, a task for the poet in our days of uncertainty and growing ecological awareness.

Kavanagh describes his origins as being "so peculiarly humble that I never had the courage to tell about them. I always started when things were moving into the realms of literary respectability." ("The Gallivanting Poet" *November Haggard*, 18).

He quotes Longfellow: "How strange a thing like that happens to a man. He dabbles in something and does not realise it is his life." (Kavanagh, "Schoolbook Poetry" *November Haggard*, 8, and *Kavanagh's Weekly*, No. 5, May 10, 1952, 8). He wrote a decade later: "I have a belief in poetry as a mystical thing, and a dangerous thing." (Author's Note, *Collected Poems*, xiii).

Kavanagh began his poetic apprenticeship in the 1920s—and his first poems appeared in the Irish newspapers and in the literary periodicals of the time. The verses were celebratory of Nature as an unbounded source of beauty, Kavanagh imagining himself a priest or druid, so this early pastoral was theocratic and creationist, the countryside being seen as the work of a Divine being:

Joy that is timeless! O heart

That knows God!

(*Collected Poems*, ed. Quinn 7)

Indeed, he called himself a priest of beauty, rather like the Druids who had held sway in Ireland in the pre-Christian era:

O cut for me life's bread, for me pour wine!

("Worship," *Complete Poems* 16)

Such rhapsodies appeared in his first volume, *Ploughman and Other Poems*, published in 1936 by Macmillan in London. Some of these poems appear in the later editions of complete and collected poems.

Kavanagh was ambitious for a literary career, finding the tiring work on the farm and the limited society of his neighbours stifling to the creative impulse. He left his native birthplace, Inniskeen, in 1939 as war broke out in Europe, with the idea of seeking his fortune as a poet in the city, where "arts, music, letters are the real things"

("Temptation in Harvest" *Collected Poems* ed. Quinn 121). In this poem written some years after his arrival in the city, the poet's ambivalence about the values of the city, and those of the country, are magnificently coded. "Temptation in Harvest" is a Janus-like construction which creates an eloquent tension between his love for the countryside and the fascination the city held for him as the source of Art and Culture:

Now I turn  
Away from the ricks, the sheds, the cabbage garden,  
The stones of the street, the thrush song in the tree,  
The potato-pits, the flaggers in the swamp;  
From the country heart that hardly learned to harden,  
From the spotlight of an old-fashioned kitchen lamp  
I go to follow her who winked at me.

("Temptation in Harvest," *Collected Poems* ed. Quinn,  
123)

This is very far from the staged mannerism of country life promulgated by Yeats and the Abbey Theatre, which, with its hint of arcane magic had captivated its readers. Yeats' legacy was to create a new Ireland and a new nationalism; so Patrick Kavanagh, the ploughboy poet, on his arrival in Dublin, was immediately fitted to be the authentic peasant bard of the Irish Literary Revival. He had already written an autobiographical novel, *The Green Fool*, which had been withdrawn under threat of a libel action.<sup>1</sup> This novel, which had a very limited circulation, did nothing to persuade the reader that Kavanagh was not a country bumpkin: besides, these readers remained few because the new Republic of Ireland was isolated in its neutral position in the unfolding cataclysm of the Second World War.

So, from the beginning of his career, Kavanagh's work was curtailed, confined and judged by the literary practitioners in Dublin's pubs and journalistic water holes, where they had a reputation of being mean-spirited and spiteful - friendly as an alligator tank"(Connolly, 9). Some of these groups of journalists and writers matched the ideologies of the contemporary political world of left and right, but these also were a problem for the poet. Caught between these audiences, Kavanagh was forced to view himself as their antagonist, and the crude stereotypes imposed on the writer often resulted in him responding with complete caricature both to the picture of the country poet, unlettered and lisping, or to the peasant without manners, who was therefore unwelcome at board and lecture hall. He described his audience as drawing out of him what was "loud, journalistic, and untrue" (Kavanagh, *Self Portrait*, 14, *Collected Prose* 16).

His poem, "Peasant," more clearly than any other reflects on this refusal to be a stereotype:

I am the representative of those  
Clay-faced sucklers of spade-handles,  
Bleak peasants for whom Apollo blows

Aesthetic winds in nine-day laboured scandals.  
I am the hoarse cry of creatures who  
Have never scratched in any kind of hand  
On any wall the signs by which they knew  
The endurable stone in the phantasmic land.  
Their history is a grain of wheat. A season  
The cycle of a race that will persist  
When all the scintillating tribes of reason  
Are folded in a literary mist.  
Fear-grey men of doom have kept for me  
The foot-grip of an ancient surety.

(*Complete Poems*, 30)

This reads as a heady, if ironic, antidote to the deterministic materialism so rampant among left-wing followers in the thirties and beyond. Marxism, which can be reductionist, had tried to make the human being into a materialist construct, which mirrored the scientific ideas of the day of mass determinism, proposing objective criteria for human consciousness, which were then met at the political level. What Kavanagh does is to supersede these structures and celebrate consciousness itself, by-passing this analysis of society, achieving a pre-Hellenic note.

Kavanagh goes even further in his disregard of social stereotype, as he has a symbiotic, phallic relationship with his plough, which comes to symbolise his sexual frustration, and takes the fields he has ploughed as if they were a bride, rather than an ordinary human woman. This constitutes the theme of his long poem, *The Great Hunger*, which has been described by his critics as the best long poem written about Ireland since Oliver Goldsmith's "The Deserted Village" (Anonymous, 18 – the writer of the Profile which led to his libel action – see Quinn, *Biography of Patrick Kavanagh*, 314-317). This poem would have quite a resonance with the Freudianism of the day, and it represents one area of the psychological terrain which he shared with his audience. Like the poet, they too had suffered sexual privation and were keenly aware of the life-predicament that the Catholic Church had cast them into:

And the moral-brake sickness in me from some lie  
Believed by my mother before I was born.

("Lover," *Complete Poems*, 340)

*The Great Hunger* has been described as "anti-pastoral," "exposing the distance between reality and the pastoral convention when that distance is [...] conspicuous" (Gifford, 128) and functioning "as an attack on the way the Church has pastoralised Nature as part of the process of taking over an innate pantheism and repressing sexuality" (Gifford, 129). However, when it was published in 1942, Irish society as a whole did not have Kavanagh's courage in being vocal and critical, which led him to

the conclusion that the Catholic teaching on this doctrine was faulty and a misinterpretation of scripture, calling it heretical. (Kavanagh, "Sex and Christianity" *Kavanagh's Weekly*, No. 7, May 24, 1952, 7).

He had gained serious readers as *The Great Hunger* was to have immediate resonance with the emotional context of his audience, and he became a popular poet almost by default. However, he had lost his original vision of the plenitude of Nature, as he reflected on his asexual, seemingly sterile state. There is a certain sexual ambiguity about his failure to find fertility in his own life, and it goes back to the spell the plough cast on him since his earlier days, when he went from innocent celebrant of Nature and her beauties to wry observer of human nature in the cities:

Plough, take your thin arms from around my middle

Leave me free to unscroll the wisdom of other flesh.

("Plough," *Complete Poems*, 61)

This anti-pastoral appears far removed from the idyllic conjunction of humankind and Nature that had characterized poetry before this time. Kavanagh is not merely elegiac for the past left behind in the countryside, and the concomitant loss of feeling, but he moreover seeks to find a new aesthetic which will also win him an audience in the city where

[...] The rude

Unknowing throng

Pushed and shoved

One who loved.

("Gay Cities," *Complete Poems*, 11)

The development of this new aesthetic capable of coming to terms with the "anti-pastoral" energies of the city would take some time. He was to struggle for many years, not only because the city proved alien, but also because of his own complicated nature which found day-to-day acquaintanceship and friendship problematic. Departing from Kavanagh's original simplicity and celebration of Nature, the verse of his middle years can be seen as a record of argument with his audience's expectations; yet, he withstood the reification of personality that left-wing rhetoric demanded. In spite of these failures, when he had to resort to satire, he showed originality in his refusal to be pigeonholed either as a poet or as a man, since he came to realise that

But satire is unfruitful prayer

Only wild shoots of pity there,

("Prelude," *Complete Poems*, 276)

Compounding Kavanagh's initial difficulties as a poet having to overcome dualism and reconcile a country sensibility with an urban environment was that, from the beginning, his love of beauty had led him to celebrate and to look for the love of women. Although he successfully portrayed the social conditions in Ireland, he had

not yet resolved the age-old conflict between the spirit and the flesh on a personal level. In these early years of his maturing as a man and an artist, before he came to the city, we have noted that he was drawn to pagan mythology as a source and celebrant of beauty. However, in the city, he found beauty only on rare occasions, and there was no surrounding of Nature which he could tap into for its vast treasury. In his journey, from "A thing that is beautiful/I may know," "Ploughman" *Collected Poems*, Ed. Quinn, 6-7) to the heart that "knows God" (ibid.), he sought the occasion of beauty, often losing it in the crowd and convulsions of city life.

Visual beauty was, in fact, at all times the portal to his completeness as a human, but its doors remained locked to him during his middle years when satire overtook his spirit. Even as an infant, Kavanagh had sensed the immortality and universality of beauty. In *The Green Fool*, his suppressed autobiographical novel, he writes:

I was in my mother's arms clinging with my small hands to the security of her shoulder. I saw into a far mysterious place that I long associated with Wordsworth's "Ode to Immortality". I believed for many years that I had looked back into the world from whence I came. (*The Green Fool*, 13)

So it was the ghost of his early memories that provided Kavanagh with the language and inspiration he needed towards the end of his life to make the journey from his early experience of beauty in the countryside to the recreation of it in the city when he was a mature poet.

He came to the actualisation of this journey in the form of a flash-like insight, immediately after a serious lung operation in 1955. In the post-operative state, which we now know can have the characteristic of a suddenly experienced trauma, with attendant euphoria as a reaction to shock, he was able to re-imagine his relationship with his urban surroundings and to tie it in with his early awareness of the beauty in Nature. He was thrown by the physical, post-surgery shock into an epiphany when he realised "love's doorway to life/ is the same doorway everywhere." ("Innocence," *Collected Poems*, ed. Quinn, 183). It is this connection of love to beauty which holds the key to his ultimate salvation and redemption in the city and which rescues the poet in him in the end.

As he lay on the banks of the Grand Canal in Dublin, recovering from the shock of operation, he arrived at a new aesthetic. Suddenly, in late middle age, he found himself in a state which he named as his rebirth ("Self-Portrait," *Collected Poems*, 15-16). All the complications of his life in the city, the daily grind for money and survival, the contentiousness and argumentativeness he had known with his literary companions in the pubs of Dublin, the insincere good nature of the class of Dubliner he came across—which he describes as the most hurtful of all ("Tale of Two Cities," *Complete Poems* 223-4)—these painful feelings were let go of with a newly discovered sense of fruitfulness, compassion, joy and fulfilment.

Not only did his stay in the hospital give him the experience of love for all things; it also helped the idea of *the commonplace as the occasion of beauty*—an idea which had lain dormant for some time when he was a journeyman poet in the city - become Kavanagh's great theme. Even in things like the furniture in the hospital, which were an "art lover's woe" ("The Hospital," *Collected Poems*, ed. Quinn 217), he embraced the condition of love fully and extended his vision of beauty to include all common, ordinary and everyday particulars:

A year ago I fell in love with the functional ward

Of a chest hospital: square cubicles in a row,  
Plain concrete, wash basins - an art lover's woe,  
Not counting how the fellow in the next bed snored.  
But nothing whatever is by love debarred,  
The common and banal her heat can know.  
The corridor led to a stairway and below  
Was the inexhaustible adventure of a gravelled yard.

("The Hospital," *Collected Poems*, ed. Quinn, 217)

Franca Bellarsi has commented that "the apparently insignificant entity of gravel stands at the intersection between culture and nature: a product of culture that is still reminiscent of the raw material found in nature, a product of nature transformed by culture, but in a way that still reconnects the city 'yard' ([...] man-made) to a more foundational ground beyond the city." (Bellarsi n.p.). I consider this interpretation apposite, and also feel that there is some connection with the gravel found in the wake of glaciers, when the ice breaks up stone and rock, its emotional parallel in the poem being obvious.

In his sojourn in the city, where he was to live until he died in 1967, Kavanagh may, at times, have lacked the visual aspect of beauty as understood in conventional pastoral landscapes, but this lack in the end provided him with a final, original, and all-conquering aesthetic of beauty: namely, one that redefined the "natural" as not being first and foremost linked to the land, but as being rather primordially tied to the suchness of things. Moreover, this predisposition to see "the immortal in things mortal" ("On Looking into E.V. Rieu's Homer," *Collected Poems*, ed. Quinn, 184-5) also allowed Kavanagh to preserve a direct link to Wordsworth and, as a result, to still be able to imagine the remembered natural forms behind the imperfect ones that more immediately met the eye:

In stubble fields the ghosts of corn are  
The important spirits the imagination heeds  
("On Looking into E.V. Rieu's Homer,"  
*Collected Poems*, ed. Quinn, 184-5)

This indeed is a new pastoral - the pastoral of the city. At this time, Kavanagh wrote several sonnets, known as the Canal Bank sonnets, which celebrate the greenness of this oasis in the city, and how it led to his own rebirth and completion as poet and man, "when he grew with Nature again as once I grew" ("Canal Bank Walk," *Collected Poems*, ed. Quinn 224). His intrinsic appreciation of beauty, his sense of mysticism, and the celebration of the ordinary fuse together to make these sonnets among the most original Nature poems by any poet of the English language, especially since they continue to resonate with us, as pieces written when the western world went on with industrial expansion.

There is no doubt that an urban audience—one removed from and unaware of Nature, one rooted in Nature but not knowing it - can present a problem to the Nature poet. Furthermore, their lack of vision can also make them corruptible. To read the Irish poets coming after Kavanagh, urban reality can seem like a fall from grace. My own experience as a poet, who left Ireland to teach in the industrial city of Birmingham in the 1960s, was that such a city and the journeying back and forth across the Irish Sea took the form of Arnold's "Sea of Faith" ("Dover Beach") becoming *The Sea of Affliction* (Rowley 1987), an unconscious borrowing at the time. Kavanagh was fortunate in that in his later years, he did not suffer the severe deprivations of most people in the city, but his poetry, the legacy of his journey, can persuade us that even those tainted by urban life, unable to reach natural beauty—"natural" in the sense of being directly linked to the pristine land - can achieve an understanding capable of resolving the dualism opposing Nature and Culture, beauty and ugliness, rural and urban landscapes. This provides nourishment for poets after Kavanagh, his aesthetic proving especially valuable in today's media-saturated society.

Wordsworth had seen the problem almost one hundred and fifty years before as England was becoming industrialised:

For a multitude of causes unknown to former times are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and unfitting it for all voluntary exertion to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor [...] When I think upon this degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation, I am almost ashamed to have spoken of the feeble effort with which I have endeavoured to counteract it; and reflecting upon the magnitude of the general evil, I should be oppressed with no dishonourable melancholy, had I not a deep impression of certain inherent and indestructible qualities of the human mind, and likewise of certain powers in the great and permanent objects that act upon it which are equally inherent and indestructible; and did I not further add to this impression a belief that the time is approaching when the evil will be systematically opposed by men of greater powers and with far more distinguished success [...] ("Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*", lines 230-258, 64-65.)

While not achieving the noble sententiousness of Wordsworth, Kavanagh recast his self as both the partaker, celebrant and creator of beauty in the urban—which kept his audience aware of the mystery and loveliness of what was often thought of as ordinary and trivial. Traditionally, pastoral poets had tried to inculcate moral teaching into their audience as the cities swelled and ties with the countryside were lost, a loss that started in the seventeenth century and that only continued to intensify over the following ones and well into our own. With the imminence of the industrial revolution, which had begun to despoil the countryside, the poet began to see himself as a teacher. As Jonathan Bate puts it:

What, then, are the politics of our relationship to nature? For a poet, pastoral is the traditional mode in which that relationship is explored. Pastoral has not done well in recent neo-Marxist criticism, but if there is to be an ecological criticism the "language that is ever green" must be reclaimed ... I would suggest ... that Wordsworth built an account of the pastoral into the pivotal retrospective eight book of *The Prelude* in order to forge a link between the holistic values of his native vales and the "social meliorism" that underlay the French Revolution. (170)



Kavanagh did not have a project of "social melioration" - rather he remained resolutely apolitical. Thus, his poetry is not overtly didactic yet can point a way forward. As he grew older, and with the sudden insight of his rebirth, he had placed himself in opposition to all those ideologies of materialism and progress which dominated the western world in the early decades of the last century. His project was not so much to do with ideas of social improvement, but rather consisted in finding an audience who would share in his celebration. He admitted that he had "no messianic impulse" ("Self Portrait," *Collected Prose*, 14), no role as a teacher, but that he was simply happy to be a celebrant of the "immortal" in the urban ordinary and to share that experience with his readers. Kavanagh, thus, furnishes us with a modern example of both the liberating potential and more politically naïve aspects of his new kind of pastoral.

Kavanagh's perception of beauty, his drawing attention to the uniqueness of his way of seeing the urban, was allied to his need to shake off old social and religious identities, while at the same time still acknowledging or in part subscribing to them. His ultimate sophistication in "not caring" ("Self Portrait", 24, *Collected Prose*, 20) as he lay on the canal bank and abjured all strife—"my purpose in life is to have no purpose" (Author's Note, *Collected Poems*, xiv)—hints at a religious sublimation and can seem as if the poet is at odds with himself.

However, it is meaningful from the perspective of what Heaney has called "the abandonment of a life in order to find more abundant life" ("The Placeless Heaven," *Finders Keepers* 142), and as such constitutes a gift of the poetic spirit to our times of deprivation from Nature. In the process, Kavanagh embraced a mysticism which became as much of a motif in his work as the love of the ordinary and common beauty that sustained it. Moreover, Kavanagh began to realise that there was no essential conflict between Nature and art, precisely because what they had in common was beauty—the same one that came his way as a very young child. The key to his new aesthetic is *acceptance of physical presence at all times*, which in turn leads to celebration and love, and which also initiates a "post-pastoral" practice of reconnection between Nature and Culture, the inner and the outer, the human and the non-human, death and rebirth, as outlined by Terry Gifford (152, 153, 156, 163).

Seamus Heaney has amplified this post-pastoral in one of his later essays, noting that Kavanagh developed in such a way that "the world is more pervious to his vision than he is pervious to the world" ("The Placeless Heaven," *Finders Keepers* 136). Heaney finds value in what Kavanagh defined as the parochial: "Kavanagh gave you permission to dwell without cultural anxiety among the usual landmarks of your life." ("The Placeless Heaven," *Finders Keepers* 140). Moreover, Heaney further assesses the development of Kavanagh's urban vision as follows:

I am not affirming here the superiority of the rural over the urban/suburban as a subject for poetry, nor am I out to sponsor deprivation at the expense of cultivation. I am not insinuating that one domain of experience is more intrinsically poetical or more ethnically desirable than another. [...] [Kavanagh's poetry] is not a reactive response to some stimulus in the world out there. Instead, it is a spurt of abundance from a source within and it spills over to irrigate the world beyond the self. ("The Placeless Heaven," *Finders Keepers* 139, 143)

Kavanagh's legacy to the Irish poets coming after him is precisely this: in the post-modern world with its shifting emphases and values, his journey from "simplicity back to simplicity" (Kavanagh, "Suffering and Literature," *Collected Prose* 278) is the

cornerstone of the poetic self, and can be a redemptive source for those who wish to articulate and go beyond this pain of up-rootedness.

Moreover, in the quest for autobiographical integrity, anyone who lives in the city, can find in Kavanagh's openness to "what is" a starting point from which to read anew and re-appraise their urban experience, the need for this reappraisal now being felt with growing urgency across the world in response to the crisis that human beings have inflicted on Nature. As ecological awareness arises in nearly all our global societies today, the dereliction of the urban landscape and the spoliation of Nature have found their muse in Kavanagh, albeit in a mode that refuses to abandon lyricism and rhyme for the minimal artifice and condensation of the image favoured by some of his modernist contemporaries (William Carlos Williams comes to mind). What indeed remains constant in Kavanagh is his link between Nature and the Divine - how the poet becomes an interpreter of the mystical relationship between them. But as Heaney appositely stresses: "it is only when this ethereal literary voice incarnates itself in the imagery of the actual world that its messages of transcendence become credible" ("From Monaghan to the Grand Canal," *Preoccupations*, 120).

Kavanagh stands out virtually alone among his contemporaries in evolving this aesthetic, but there is now the opportunity for his work to have a seminal and important influence. Seamus Heaney has found in the later Kavanagh the place where, in Yeats words, "the soul recovers radical innocence" ("A Prayer for my Daughter") and that link can be forged (Heaney, "The Placeless Heaven," *Finders Keepers* 144). It is this link and the post-pastoral connection which will prove most valuable in evaluating Kavanagh's work and its legacy in our times. Perhaps his greatest influence is yet to come, particularly among those readers of our now ecologically aware age, who will find that his aesthetic has resonance with all city dwellers. This aesthetic at times rises to the heights of a religious awareness as in the extraordinary poem "Common Beauty" (*Complete Poems* 205). While not providing us with Wordsworthian exhortation, this instructional piece epitomises Kavanagh's way of seeing, one which allows beauty to be celebrated even in the meanest parts of the city:

I will forget all that was cultivated, all that was told

How to be beautiful ...

Ah, that lane, a short-cut to Clonsilla

Worn in the middle

Where a stream of dirty water ran

Its sloping banks grew broken bottles like grass,

My God baptised me there by the hands of John.

There is a cart-pass in Drumnagrella—

I could cry, almost, remembering its excitement in July

When mowing with an old scythe the rushes that fringed the rim of the  
ruts

I learned how not to die.

("Common Beauty," *Complete Poems* 205)

## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> This was due to its portrayal thought derogatory—of a real person, namely the wife of the Celtic Twilight poet A.E., on whom the fledgling poet had called.

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<http://www.tcd.ie/English/patrickkavanagh/>

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